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Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day? Analytical Essay

Shakespeare’s eighteenth sonnet, *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?,* is a poem about love, beauty, and immortality that still strikes the heart of people today. It is the perfect example of the eternal nature of literature; it has been read and analyzed ever since Shakespeare wrote it during the Elizabethan Age. The meaning has remained the same and the reactions have not varied much either; it is a proclamation of beauty like no other. Shakespeare creates an adoring, sweet, and tender tone through his use of imagery, literary devices, sound, and rhythm.

Shakespeare believes that the woman he describes in the poem is the most beautiful being he has ever seen in his entire life. By proclaiming that she surpasses a summer day in beauty, he is conveying his opinion that she is extremely attractive. The topic of the entire poem is the woman and her loveliness. The audience is the woman and anyone else who will listen; Shakespeare yearns for all people to notice her beauty like he does. He makes his theme quite obvious throughout the piece and he utilizes many devices that allude to his adoring tone.

Shakespeare implements various images to convey his theme and to present his tone. Nature is the prime subject of these images; he compares natural scenes to the woman’s appearance. Shakespeare lists all of the shortcomings of summer: “rough winds do shake the darling buds of May” (1.3); the wind sometimes threatens to ruin the beauty of nature, but nothing will ever jeopardize the woman’s beauty. The phrases “too hot the eye of heaven shines” (1.5) and “his gold complexion dimmed” (1.6) both display heaven’s inferiority in comparison to the woman. Sometimes the sun is too hot and sometimes it is covered by clouds, but the woman’s beauty is never too bright and it will never be blocked by anything. Not only does the woman surpass summer’s beauty, she also surpasses summer’s length. Summer always comes to an end, “its lease hath all too short a date” (1.4), but the woman’s attractiveness has no end. These images provoke a sense of love; the beautiful scenes seem like the perfect place to fall in love. They also incite the idea of immortality because the woman’s beauty will never end and the poem will never be forgotten because there will always be new people around to read it.

Shakespeare also employed many literary devices to reveal his theme and tone. Alliteration can be found sprinkled throughout the lines of the poem; “changing course” (1.8), “summer shall” (1.9), and “long lives” (1.14), are all prime examples of this device. The alliteration helps to reinforce the tone. “Long lives” (1.14) represents the longevity of the woman’s beauty , “changing course” (1.8) alludes to the fact that summer always ends and a new season always takes its place; but the woman’s beauty will never fade or be replaced. Shakespeare also implements personification to compose his viewpoint and theme. He personifies the light of heaven by saying, “the eye of heaven, his gold complexion dimmed” (1.5-6) in comparison to the light of beauty that radiates from the woman.

The sound of the poem is what ties the piece together and makes it a unified whole. *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?* Is a Shakespearean sonnet that consists of three quatrains and one couplet and it strictly follows all the rules for a sonnet. There are ten syllables in each line, it is written in iambic pentameter, and the rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFE GG. The rhyming is a vital aspect of the poem because it contributes to the poem’s tone. The pattern and the adherence to the rules also help to create the poem’s tone.

Imagery, literary devices, sound, and rhythm all play a key role in the development of Shakespeare’s piece. The imagery helps to convey the woman’s incredible beauty, the literary devices aid in reinforcing the tone and theme, and the sound and rhythm give the poem its own unique style. All of these devices work together to fabricate one all-encompassing theme- the beauty of the woman. This work is an ode to the pleasant appearance of the woman and Shakespeare’s great appreciation of her beauty. The purpose of this entire poem is to express Shakespeare’s love for the woman and her eternal beauty and allure. All of the devices and the format of the poem exemplify the theme of her beauty and contribute to the overall tender tone. The poem answers the title’s question, *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?,* with ano, because the woman exceeds the wonder and loveliness of a mere summer day.

Works Cited

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